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ABSTRACT

Expectations that international efforts to promote education would lead to widespread economic development faltered in the late 1970's as educational theorists became increasingly aware of the realities of inadequate resources, underestimated self-interest among the economically and politically powerful, and incompletely comprehended relationships among education, development, economic capacity, and cultural attitudes. Early interests in achieving equity have waned, national and international resources for social improvement have shrunk, and efforts at decentralization of planning and policymaking have been revealed in many instances as cosmetic at best. Rather than fall into cynicism, however, leaders and policymakers can take advantage of recent developments to begin a more realistic effort to encourage educational and economic improvement. These developments include new understanding of linkages between education and other social conditions, promising results from nontraditional experiments in linking education and economic development, continued demand for education among Third World populations, and improved awareness of the inadequacies of research once assumed to have global application. By following the lead of these developments, an activist agenda can be implemented, based on practice rather than theory. (PGD)

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EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT: BEYOND THE AGE OF SKEPTICISM

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Paper presented at the joint SIDEC/CIES Conference on "Education and Development in Comparative Perspective", Stanford University, April 18, 1985

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Shortly after I returned to Stanford from the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) in 1977, I was asked to write a background paper for the External Advisory Panel that had been established, under the chairmanship of David Bell, to evaluate the World Bank's program in education. They were looking for somebody who was outside of the Bank's operations, but who had a reasonable grasp of the field (people like that were assumed to exist in those days), and the idea was to apprise the panel on what were at that juncture considered to be the principal issues in the relationship between education and development.

I was probably still under the influence of the heady air of UNESCO in which I had lived for the preceding few years, and in which one tends to succumb more often than is perhaps useful to the temptation of describing the world in broad, sweeping strokes. Whatever the reason, I was bold enough to accept what, to anybody in a more modest and realistic state of mind, should have appeared as an extraordinarily ambitious and perhaps even impossible assignment.

Whether the External Advisory Panel derived any useful insights from my reflections I don't know. I know even less whether what I had to say at the time had any effect on what the World Bank did in the field of education since then. Indeed, there have been occasions when I was tempted to disavow any connection between what I wrote and what the Bank ended up doing.

Be that as it may, the piece did ultimately find a marginally larger audience by getting published in Comparative Education (1978) under the title "Education and Development: From the Age of Innocence to the Age of Skepticism". I consider this one of the more aptly formulated titles in my

bibliography in the sense that it does quite succinctly and adequately convey the point I was trying to make in the paper:

"The kind of innocence that expressed itself in some rather sweeping assumptions about the kinds of social and economic effects to which educational growth would lead has gradually given way to a more differentiated and cautious view of the complex and contingent nature of the relationship between education and development. Educational expansion, as we now know, does not necessarily make either people or countries more prosperous; instead it may, and does, leave the former without jobs and the latter with increasingly burdensome claims on public funds. Not only has educational growth failed to achieve greater equity in the distribution of income, goods, and statuses, it seems in many cases to have contributed to reproducing and further consolidating the inequalities already existing in a given society. The expectation of achieving, by way of a combination of manpower projections and educational planning, an equilibrium between the productive capacities of the educational system and the absorptive capacity of the labor market had become one of the most conspicuous fatalities as the age of innocence has disappeared, testifying to both the excessive simplicity of the original model and to the divergent dynamics of its education and manpower elements. Other development strategies which were predicated upon the notion of a leverage which education could bring to bear relatively independently upon desired economic developments or social and political changes (for example, education as an agent of national integration) have, on the whole, not been conspicuous for their success." (180)

Etc., etc. -- by now all of this is probably old hat, and it wasn't exactly a revolutionary revelation even in 1977. But it did seem worth impressing upon peoples' attention, and it seemed particularly worth going beyond this level of generality and looking a bit more closely into exactly why a good deal more skepticism seemed to be justified, and what kind of a more realistic agenda for both policy and inquiry might emerge from the age of skepticism. In the paper, I proceeded to do this by looking at two sets of three issues each: Three that seemed to have more to do with the substance of educational policy, and three more procedural issues. The first set of three comprised the issues of

- equity,
- the relationship between education and work, and
- the issue of educational reform.

The second set of more procedural issues had to do with

- transparency and participation in educational decision-making,
- the knowledge and information base for policy choices, and
- the issue of self-reliance and independence in policy choices.

Every one of these issues, I argued then, provided ground for some healthy measure of skepticism about how far we had really been able to penetrate the relationship between education and development. I will come back to some of these issues later on, but I will spare you for now the more detailed argument. Most good libraries carry Comparative Education, and I still have plenty of reprints for anybody interested in studying professional perceptions (or errors) over time.

The point of what I am trying to say today is, in brief, that skepticism is no longer enough (if, indeed, it ever was), that we who are

interested in both understanding and "improving" (whatever that may mean) the relationship between education and development are called upon to move beyond the age of skepticism, just as it was at an earlier point imperative to move beyond the all too facile assumptions of the age of innocence. What lies beyond skepticism is a little harder to construe, but I will be bold enough to make some suggestions as we go along.

First of all, however, lest we misunderstand eachother, I should emphasize that there is still plenty to be skeptical about both in the reality of the relationship between education and development and in our thinking about that relationship. Let me mention three areas where my own skepticism has substantially increased rather than decreased over the past decade or so.

Where education and equity is concerned, I think two things have happened which, if anything, reinforce my initial skepticism. One, some of our earlier and more sanguine expectations about a positive relationship between an expansion of educational opportunities and greater equity in the distribution either of these opportunities or of the social and economic rewards that go with them have been even less justified than even I thought in 1977. In fact, even the one major policy device that was to assure at least a certain modest degree of equity at the base of the system -- the achievement of universal primary education -- has come upon hard and difficult times in many Third World countries, especially in Africa. This has to do, on the one hand, with the prohibitive cost of achieving "UPE" in a good many countries (Smyth 1982). At the same time, a very peculiar political process has begun to shape up in which the more well-to-do groups

at the top of the society militate vigorously (and often quite successfully) for sustaining and, indeed, increasing the share of resources that goes to the more advanced, post-primary kinds of educational institutions from which their offspring stand to benefit most. Clearly, this strategy limits the resources that can go into universalizing a broad system of mass education at the primary level, especially where those resources are rather finite and shrinking anyway.

The second reason why my initial skepticism about the relationship between educational development and equity has become exacerbated is that, in the macraculture of contemporary politics, equity as a salient political issue seems to have gone out of style in recent years. Now maybe this is a reflection of having lived through four long years of Reaganomics, but I don't think so. I sense the same shift -- from an at least credibly argued concern with redistribution at the national as well as at the international level to a rather vigorous commitment to the virtues of achievement and excellence -- in a wide variety of settings and languages: In many parts of Western Europe, notably in West Germany, the United Kingdom, France, certainly in and around the World Bank (where the verbal commitment to a more equitable distribution of opportunities always had a somewhat hollow ring to it; I remember John Simmons when he was still working there remarking that, when you came right down to it, only China and Cuba lived up to the World Bank's programs) -- and I sense a similar shift, although much less dramatically, in such bastions of redistributive politics as Sweden and Tanzania. Equity just is not "in" right now, and it would well be worth a separate treatise to figure out exactly why this is so.

A second area where skepticism is now at least as much called for as it was in the mid-seventies is the financing of education in the context of both national resources and international assistance. The fiscal crisis in large parts of the Third World was real enough then, and certainly has become no less real since. If anything, the state of public finances has become even more dismal as the result of a compounding debt problem, of agricultural production and distribution problems for both seasonal and structural reasons, of a further erosion of international price structures for primary commodities, and a number of assorted other reasons. The choice between progressive insolvency and the iron fist of the IMF is awesome indeed and, to an increasing extent (see Sudan and possibly very soon Zaire) politically fatal for incumbent regimes. The competition for finite and shrinking public resources has, as a result, become even fiercer than before, and it is by no means a foregone conclusion that education is going to win. I should think that education will even have some difficulties hanging on to its share of the total resource pool, let alone increasing it.

(It's pretty obvious, incidentally, how that kind of a resource situation compounds the competition among social groups for different kinds and levels of educational services, especially as between primary and post-primary education.)

As we all know, this internal resource crisis is exacerbated by what, at best, is a stagnant picture as far as international development assistance is concerned. Over the last five years, we are now down to an average annual increase of 2.2% in official ODA (as compared to a mean of 4.5% over the past ten years). If we put this together with the marked

decrease in the flow of private resources, with the deterioration in concessionary terms, and with such developments as an increase in tied over untied aid, the net result is, as I have argued elsewhere, a "steady state" situation at best (Weiler 1984; OECD 1984).

Thus, far from picking up some of the slack in domestic resource conditions, international development assistance has tended barely to hold its own, and this is true for both bilateral and multilateral assistance, although multilateral aid is in even more trouble, in some considerable part due to this country's ambivalence towards IDA.

I have broader and more structural problems with the functioning and the rationale of much of the system of international development assistance -- and I share some of the criticisms of people like P.T. Bauer (1981), although perhaps for different reasons. But the point I am making here is simply that, between the crisis of public resources at the national level and the stagnation of international assistance, educational development, expansion, and improvement is in particular jeopardy. To be sure, there is room for economies at the margin, and Jean Claude Eicher (1984) makes a persuasive case for the possibility of reducing unit costs (in the case of Francophone Africa). He also argues persuasively about how economical it would be to shift public subsidies from higher to lower levels of education; the problem with this notion is that, precisely because of the kinds of political dynamics that I have described a moment ago, this kind of shift is rather unlikely to happen. The overall picture does remain bleak with regard to both quantitative expansion and qualitative improvement (and we are kidding ourselves if we believe that the latter can be had free!), and even

the World Bank's remarkably up-beat "Joint Program of Action" "Toward Sustained Development in Sub-Saharan Africa" (1984) comes to some rather dire conclusions when it looks at education (29-30).

Another issue with which I dealt in the 1977 paper was that of "participation and transparency" in the processes of educational planning and policy-making. Here, the political rhetoric in favor of greater and broader participation was particularly seductive and insistent, and could have fooled some of the best of us. Even OECD had started talking and publishing about "Participatory Planning" (1974), and if you didn't look really close, it looked at times as if the "age of participation" was right around the corner.

But beware.

Maybe I was a bit naive myself in assuming that there was at least a possibility of breaking out of the heavily centralized and bureaucratized mode that prevails in educational planning and policy in many countries -- even in countries where the governance of educational systems is formally "decentralized" at the regional or local level. But I think we had better realize that, in the majority of situations where the rhetoric of policy participation was invoked, it was more than anything else a device of what I have called elsewhere "compensatory legitimation" (Weiler 1983) -- the attempt on the part of political regimes to make up for their loss of credibility by invoking the legitimating symbolism of imposed participatory processes, without ever intending any real devolution of power.

Here as elsewhere, it is quite amazing how far the strategy of "verbal mystification" has invaded the field of education and development: "Words that succeed and policies that fail", as Murray Edelman has subtitled his book on "Political Language" (1977), and educational policy provides a particularly rich bounty of pertinent examples: "Reform", "basic education", "democratization", "self-reliance", "cultural authenticity" -- the list of glossy labels is long, and the reality they represent rather shallow. I find it often quite difficult not to become cynical in the face of this particularly painful contradiction: On the one hand, a great deal of very dedicated, skillful, hard and often creative work goes into educational practice all over the world, often at the local, school, or classroom level, only to be regimented, coopted, or otherwise frustrated by more central agents of authority and control. At the same time, those same authorities -- ministries, inspectorates, planning agencies, often loyally assisted by clever consulting firms and not-always-so-clever international organizations, engage in verbal gamesmanship that bears little relationship to the educational reality at the grassroots -- or even at the treetops.

In view of all this, how do we answer the question of what lies beyond the age of skepticism? It looks like more skepticism, and indeed disillusionment. Champ Ward was contemplating in another talk at this meeting "the age of suspicion", where the actors in the international system are no longer given the benefit of the doubt... How does "the age of cynicism" sound to you?

To me it sounds terrible, and it also sounds wrong. There are plenty of good intellectual and political reasons for looking and for moving beyond

skepticism -- as long as we make sure that we retain the healthy insights that we have gained from being skeptical about much of the "education and development" rhetoric that has surrounded us for the last couple of decades. We have, after all, made progress of various kinds that would encourage us to look ahead and to see the future of education and development as both an intellectual and a political challenge:

- We do know, after all, a great deal more than we used to about important linkages in which education is involved. We have some good initial inklings (I am being very careful here, for good reasons) on the relationships between education and such things as agricultural productivity, child care, and some measures of health, and fairly good evidence on the relationship between education and both employment and earnings (World Bank 1980). We know very little, as Peter Moock points out quite rightly in another communication to this conference, about just what it is about "education" that causes these relationships to hold across quite a variety of situations, but at least we have something to start with. Thanks to the work of Steve Heyneman and his colleagues (e.g., Heyneman and Loxley 1982), we also operate now on much firmer ground as far as the strength of different determinants of educational achievement is concerned (cf. Schiefelbein 1983).

- There are, at the same time, some fascinating and potentially very instructive natural experiments in the field of education and development underway, in societies which have put aside some of our traditional assumptions about the relationship between education and development outcomes. I am referring to what is going on in Nicaragua and in China, and

it will be very important for us to pursue quite thoroughly and critically the kinds of educational alternatives that countries in the process of major social transformation have introduced.

- We also do know that, to some people's surprise, the social demand for education in most countries of the Third World continues at an extraordinarily high level. For whatever reason, education is a good that continues to be highly appreciated, and the general persuasion that the returns are worth the investment in time, public resources and even private resources has remained remarkably stable (Carnoy et al. 1982). The skeptical footnote to this observation has to do, of course, with the possible disillusionment and backlash once some of the more unrealistic expectations about the effects of education on individual mobility encounter disappointment, but the fact remains that large parts of the population in developing countries do continue to see education as a critical and highly valued ingredient in development policies. This view of education as a valuable commodity, as both Martin Carnoy and I have argued on a number of occasions, is shared by political elites in many parts of the Third World, although for very different reasons. They tend to see education as a possible and often the only affordable response to widespread social demands for improvements in the quality of life in their countries. Where worsening economic conditions do not permit satisfying those demands in more tangible ways -- income, housing, nutrition, health --, educational improvement, while not exactly cheap, is seen as serving as a viable surrogate means of satisfying social demand and thereby shoring up the legitimacy of beleaguered regimes.

- And there are also, and we have had an impressive example at this conference in Majid Rahnema's address, the "subversive" forces in education and development, which are likely to become a new ferment of alternative conceptions of the ways in which education relates to a society's efforts to sustain its own identity and to satisfy its own needs. Let me point out that this kind of "subversion" is more widespread than some of us might think. It has certainly captured the attention and the energies of an increasing number of professionals and people in countries of the Third World -- Rahnema mentioned Rajni Kothari and his group (1974), and there are many others; but it has also emerged on the agenda of a number of internationally oriented institutions in Europe - Patrick Dias' group on Education in the Third World in Frankfurt being a case in point (cf. Sülberg 1983; 1985).

- And there is emerging, in both the North and the South, a healthy set of antibodies to the prevailing orientations and structures of educational research. It's a fledgling development in many cases, and hard pressed to compete with the prestigious orthodoxies of the profession. But, as I have tried to show when I gave the Eggertsen lecture at the CIES meetings in Atlanta two years ago, it's a very real development nonetheless, and one that continues to receive substantial and badly needed support from the more far-sighted support agencies in the international assistance community, notably IDRC, SAREC, and the German Foundation for International Development. Extremely fascinating questions are emerging within this set of research endeavors; the critical review by Schöfthaler and Goldschmidt of Piaget's model of cognitive development in the light of cultural differences in the construction of theory is just one case in point of many; this one addresses the question of how we can make sure that the universality claim

of a theory of cognitive development does not inadvertently turn into the legitimation of a culturally successful and dominant model of the use of reason (1984, 31).

There is, in other words, a great deal to start out with on the way towards a better informed and more creative phase in both the study and the practice of education and development. The skeptics among us, however right we may be, cannot afford to rest on our claims of "I told you so". There is more than ever to do in education and development. The "age of skepticism", I believe, has to make room for "the age of activism".

By that I do not, or at least not necessarily, mean barricades and sit-ins and marching down Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington DC towards either the White House or the World Bank, depending on what your conspiracy model of the international system might be. What I do expect to happen, or what at least I hope will happen, in "the age of activism" are a number of things:

1) that we direct our intellectual attention much more directly and incisively to the relationship between knowledge and power, between research and action in the making of educational decisions; that, in other words, we make policy action a much more thoroughly studied and critically understood item on our analytical agenda;

2) that we much more actively reach out and help establish lateral linkages among researchers of different political cultures and different research cultures in an attempt to foster the re-thinking of some of our cultural

assumptions about educational research;

3) that we refuse to let established institutional structures at the national and, especially, at the international level determine the agenda, nature, and methodology of our inquiries, and that we actively seek out the best and most independent kinds of theoretical inspiration and methodological guidance; and if that means being "subversive" in the established realms of inquiry, let's not be afraid of creative subversion;

4) that we not just tolerate, but seek out approaches to the study of education and development that depart from our cherished orthodoxies, not because they are necessarily better (although some will be), but because our orthodoxies have tended to become more of a hindrance than a help in discovery; this search of new approaches is likely to lead us to the periphery -- of national societies and of the international system -- inasmuch as the centers of these systems are often too solidly incorporated into the established traditions of theory and research;

5) that we are ready for more and unabashed advocacy for the importance of education as both a human right and as a means of human liberation -- over and above and, indeed, regardless of its "developmental" yield;

6) and that we are not afraid to take sides where research, as has so often been the case in the past, is being turned into another vehicle of domination of one set of societies, one set of cultures, over another.

The most exciting thing about the age of activism is that it helps

us overcome in our own professional identity the artificial and crippling barrier between thought and action. It will allow us to conceive of policy action as an integral part of the process of generating knowledge and of testing it against the harsh standards of reality.

There are few people in our time who have captured the excitement and the importance of that possibility as eloquently as Michel Foucault, and as a conclusion, I quote from his interview on "Truth and Power":

"A new mode of the 'connection between theory and practice' has been established. Intellectuals have got used to working, not in the modality of the 'universal', the 'exemplary', the 'just-and-true-for-all', but within specific sectors, at the precise points where their own conditions of life or work situate them (housing, the hospital, the asylum, the laboratory, family and sexual relations). This has undoubtedly given them a much more immediate and concrete awareness of struggles....."

"This new configuration has a further political significance. It makes it possible, if not to integrate, at least to rearticulate categories which were previously kept separate. The intellectual <u>par excellence</u> used to be the writer: as a universal consciousness, a free subject, he was counterposed to those intellectuals who were merely <u>competent instances</u> in the service of the State or Capital -- technicians, magistrates, teachers. Since the time when each individual's specific activity began to serve as the basis for politicisation, the threshold of <u>writing</u>, as the sacralizing mark of the intellectual, has disappeared. And it has become possible to develop lateral connections across different forms of knowledge and from one

focus of politicisation to another. Magistrates and psychiatrists, doctors and social workers, laboratory technicians and sociologists have become able to participate, both within their own fields and through mutual exchange and support, in a global process of politicisation of intellectuals. This process explains how, even as the writer tends to disappear as a figurehead, the university and the academic emerge, if not as principal elements, at least as 'exchangers', privileged points of intersection....

"The important thing here, I believe, is that truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power: contrary to a myth whose history and functions would repay further study, truth isn't the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true....

"The essential political problem for the intellectual is... that of ascertaining the possibility of constituting a new politics of truth. The problem is not changing people's consciousnesses -- or what's in their heads -- but the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth."

"It's not a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power... but of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time." (1980, 126-133 passim)

An exciting agenda, my friends. Well worth a new age.

Thank you.

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